

AML HANDBOOK

TAB VI UNDERGROUND SAFETY

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Mining and Minerals Branch
Land Resources Division-WASO
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INTRODUCTION

Mining is the most dangerous work in the United States. Hundreds of miners are killed every year, and tens of thousands more are seriously injured. In addition, occupational diseases like black lung, silicosis, and lung cancer attack more slowly and silently, but they kill just the same.

In recent years, notably 1969 and 1977, public support for better health and safety protection resulted in the passage of strong Federal laws. The Federal Coal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1969 was the first strong Federal mine safety and health law. Then the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 extended coverage to all miners and encouraged the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) to enforce extensive regulations. The Act mandates the basic requirements for mine safety and health, and provides the authority for detailed regulations. The regulations are published in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) under Titles 30 and 42. MSHA is part of the Department of Labor.

This section provides an elementary discussion of mine safety and health to acquaint the reader with the unique aspects of mining concerns. Along with the references, this section is intended to be a springboard to an effective safety and health program for closing abandoned mine land (AML) sites. In addition, Tab VII Field Guide contains safety tips and a checklist of safety equipment for conducting site inventories and reconnaissance.

TO ENTER OR NOT?

The first answer to the question of whether or not to enter an abandoned underground mine is "don't, unless you have proper training and equipment." Federal regulations require training for all persons entering mines. The minimum required training differs based on the type of mine, and the individual's task and prior mining experience.

Once you have the required training and experience, the second answer on whether to enter or not is "don't, unless you have an appropriate need." Appropriate needs include the following:

- * To determine which AML sites are the most hazardous and should be closed first.
- * To assess impacts on park resources when assessment is not possible from the surface.
- * To have a mine map available for rescues.
- * Mine rescues.

* Mine closure.

National Park Service (NPS) guidance on abandoned mine safety is given in Loss Control Management, NPS-50, Chapter 30, "Abandoned Mine Safety." This guidance states that "Coal mines in particular will not be entered unless substantial justification overrides safety concerns. Underground evaluations should be conducted only by properly trained and equipped personnel and generally are necessary only where it is likely that visitors would enter the mines if they were in the area." Refer to Tab II for additional information on Chapter 30.

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) forbids entry of underground workings in excess of 25 feet or any deeper than is required to construct a suitable closure for each opening. OSM administers a program for reclamation primarily of abandoned coal mines. NPS sites reclaimed under this program are subject to the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 and its regulations.